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Ontario  
Advisory Council  
on Senior Citizens

# Consumer Needs of Ontario's Senior Citizens



ONTARIO ADVISORY COUNCIL ON SENIOR CITIZENS

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1984 - 1985

McHale, Frances	Chairman	London
St. Lawrence, Ivy	Vice-Chairman	Toronto
Kingsbury, Elsie	Vice-Chairman	Nepean
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Kemp, Robert		Scarborough
Lanteigne, Cecile		Kapuskasing
Leschuk, Olga		Toronto
Mackie, Gibson		Scarborough
MacOdrum, Frances		Brockville
Mennill, Joseph		Aylmer
Moriarty, May		Port McNicoll
Seager, Ernest		Stoney Creek
Watson, William		Mount Forest
Withrow, John		Toronto

Mary Tate, Executive Officer  
Chris Stewart, Research Assistant

The Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Citizens was established on April 24, 1974 by an Order-in-Council approved by Her Honour the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario. Members are from a diversity of backgrounds and occupations; most of them are seniors. All members are active in their communities across the Province.

The mandate of the council is:

To advise the Government of Ontario through the Provincial Secretary for Social Development on matters pertaining to the well-being of the aged and aging persons, and without limiting the generality of the foregoing:

- a) to further promote the development and creation of opportunities for self-help for the aged, to their satisfaction and advantage as members of society as a whole;
- b) to review current policies which have a bearing on aging and the economy, involving employment, preparation for retirement, income maintenance and health measures, services and facilities of government and otherwise, including education, programs on housing, long term care, and other related services.



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## PREFACE

Since its inception in 1974, the Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Citizens has been interested in senior citizens' opinions on a wide range of subjects from housing to transportation; from community support services to long-term care; from income maintenance to drug benefits. Our interest in the issues surrounding the needs of Ontario's older consumers follows logically from Council's interests and concerns about the development of opportunities for self-help for the aged, to their satisfaction and advantage as members of society as a whole. The needs of older consumers can be viewed both as opportunities for self-help, and as marketing opportunities for those who wish to service those needs.

In 1978 Council produced a background paper entitled Through the Eyes of Others, which stemmed from seniors' responses to a questionnaire in the Summer, 1978 issue of Especially for Seniors, Council's quarterly newsletter, distributed to all seniors in the Province. Responses to this questionnaire related to the questions asked on health, education, income maintenance, and housing. A number of comments in Through the Eyes of Others dealt with consumers' concerns regarding these issues.

In November 1980, Council produced a booklet entitled Seniors Tell All, which portrayed seniors' views and attitudes towards life in general and aging. Seniors Tell All was the result of an invitation in the Summer, 1980 issue of Especially for Seniors for seniors to describe "How do you feel about getting older?" The responses also revealed certain needs of Ontario's senior consumers.

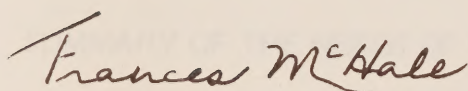
In June 1983 a feature newspaper article on "Catering to the Older Consumer" appeared in the Globe and Mail. The experts interviewed indicated that "mature consumers represent an increasingly important market..."<sup>1</sup> The article made use of demographic statistics showing Canada's population "is growing greyer," and indicated that by the year 2000 seniors will represent between 15 and 20 percent of the Provincial population. In certain areas of Ontario, it's higher than that already!



In May 1984, the Canadian Council of Better Business Bureaus sponsored a one-day seminar which they called Plus Sixty - The Marketplace Challenge of the 80's...The Older Consumer. The purpose of the conference "was to encourage meaningful exchanges between business, government and consumers on this important topic," in response to the increasing number of older people.<sup>2</sup>

In the Summer, 1984 issue of Especially for Seniors, the Advisory Council also explored this area of concern by publishing an article on the "Needs of Older Consumers," and asking "Have You an Opinion?" on this subject. We received over a hundred letters offering many suggestions and opinions on the consumer needs of seniors in Ontario.

This discussion paper is an attempt to draw together the opinions and insights that we have gathered from the above-mentioned sources, as well as from other recent studies and articles. It is also a challenge to market researchers, manufacturers, retailers, service providers, government decision-makers and to seniors themselves to address the growing consumer needs of senior citizens in Ontario.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Frances McHale". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Frances McHale  
Chairman  
Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Citizens



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	i
INTRODUCTION	1
DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW	2
CONSUMER NEEDS OF ONTARIO'S SENIOR CITIZENS	5
o Clothing	7
o Food Package Sizes in Grocery Stores and Portions in Restaurants	9
o Services for Seniors	
- Shopping and Home Delivery Services	12
- Local Information	13
o Building and Environmental Design	14
o Transportation and Travel	17
o Labelling and Print Size	19
o Furniture and Car Interior Design	20
o Health Products and Services	21
o Attitudes of Service Providers	22
CONCLUSION	23
SUMMARY OF THE NEEDS OF OLDER CONSUMERS	24
QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR BUSINESS AND GOVERNMENT	26
APPENDIX 1a and 1b - articles from Especially for Seniors	27
NOTES	29
BIBLIOGRAPHY	31



## INTRODUCTION

This paper, and most of the supporting data referred to, is not the product of a scientific study; but it is a literature survey to support the findings of a voluntary sample of responses from seniors from across Ontario on the topic of the Needs of the Older Consumer.

A demographic overview will indicate how the 'greying market' will increase in size over the next 20 years. Clothing, Food Package Sizes in Grocery Stores and Portions in Restaurants, Services for Seniors, Building and Environmental Design, Transportation and Travel, Labelling and Print Size, Furniture and Car Design, Health Products and Services and Attitudes of Services Providers are the specific areas that will be addressed.

A list of questions and suggestions will be offered at the conclusion to stimulate discussions between market researchers, service or product providers, seniors' organizations and the seniors who constitute the growing target market. Copies of this paper will also be forwarded to government to enhance awareness of the needs of older constituents. It is hoped that the dialogue between these groups will assist in the development of needed new or improved goods or services for older consumers.

Council would appreciate your views on this matter. Please forward your comments, suggestions or criticisms to:

Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Citizens  
Secretariat for Social Development  
700 Bay Street, 2nd Floor  
Toronto, Ontario  
M5G 1Z6

Telephone (416) 965-2324

## DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

According to Mr. Barry Dantzic, Vice-President and Group Manager, A.C. Nielsen and Company, "the aging or greying consumer is certainly one major opportunity area..."<sup>3</sup>

This opportunity is manifested in Ontario by the increase in the number of people over the age of sixty-five over the past ten years and by the expected increase in the number of seniors over the next twenty years. A graphic illustration of the expected increase in both the sixty-five years of age and over, and the eighty years of age and over population segments can be noted from Chart 1 (below) and from Table I (page 3).<sup>4</sup>

CHART 1

### POPULATION PROJECTIONS: MALE & FEMALE

AGED 65 & OVER; 80 & OVER: 1971-2001

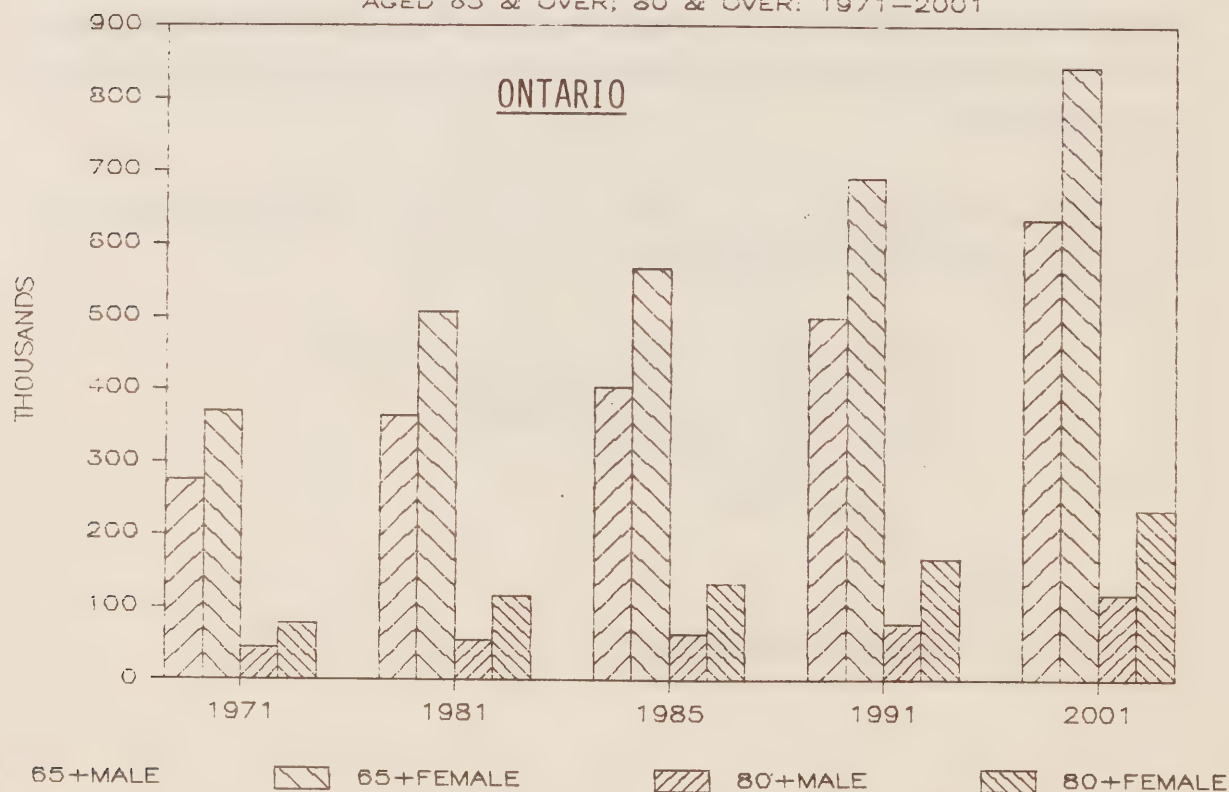


TABLE 1

POPULATION PROJECTIONS: MALE & FEMALE  
AGED 65 & OVER; 80 & OVER: 1971 - 2001

	1971	1981	1985	1991	2001
TOTAL POPULATION ONTARIO (000's)	7,703.1	8,625.1	9,015.2	9,471.0	9,944.6
MALE (65+)	274.9	361.9	403.2	499.0	634.1
FEMALE (65+)	369.5	506.3	566.7	690.2	843.3
TOTAL (65+)	644.4	868.2	969.9	1,189.2	1,477.4
PERCENTAGE (65+)					
MALE	3.5	4.1	4.4	5.2	6.3
FEMALE	4.9	6.0	6.4	7.4	8.6
TOTAL % (65+)	8.4	10.1	10.8	12.6	14.9
MALE (80+)	45.6	55.3	62.9	78.1	117.6
FEMALE (80+)	78.6	115.3	134.1	167.2	235.8
TOTAL (80+)	124.2	170.6	197.0	245.3	353.4
PERCENTAGE (80+)					
MALE	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.8	1.1
FEMALE	1.1	1.3	1.5	1.7	2.4
TOTAL % (80+)	1.6	1.9	2.1	2.5	3.5

Sources: 1971 Figures from: Census of Canada, 1971  
Cata. 92 - 713  
1981 Figures from: Census of Canada, 1981  
Cata. 92 - 901  
1985 - 2001 Figures from: Statistics  
Canada, 1983  
Projection FF 16 HC

It can be seen from Chart 1 and Table 1 that both the actual numbers of seniors and the proportion of seniors relative to the total population in Ontario, are, and will be increasing quite dramatically.

Between 1971 and 1981, Ontario's elderly population increased from 644,400 to 868,200: a net increase of 223,800 people. During the 1970's, the percentage of seniors in Ontario's total population rose from 8.4% to 10.1%. During the same period, the number of people eighty years of age and over grew from 124,200 to 170,600. This population segment grew from 1.6% of the total population in Ontario to 1.9% over this ten-year period.

From 1981 to 1991, it is expected that Ontario's elderly population will increase from 868,200 to 1,189,200: a net increase of 321,000 people. The proportion of seniors in Ontario's total population will increase from approximately 10.1% to 12.6% during the 1980's. It is also expected that the number of people eighty years of age and over will increase from 170,600 to 245,300. This will mean the proportion of the total population eighty years of age and over will be 2.5%; which will be double the increase of this population segment experienced during the 1970's.

Between 1991 and 2001, it is expected that the number of people sixty-five years of age and over in Ontario will increase from 1,189,200 to 1,477,400, which will increase the proportion of seniors in the total population from 12.6% to 14.9%. At the same time, the number of people eighty years of age and over will increase from 245,300 to 353,400, which will increase the proportion of this "old-old" group in the total population of Ontario from 2.5% to 3.5%.

In short, people are, and will be healthier and will live longer than any generation before. They will be more active, more vocal, more organized. They will have special needs as consumers. What are some of the consumer needs of this population?

## THE CONSUMER NEEDS OF ONTARIO'S SENIOR CITIZENS

In the Summer, 1984 issue of Especially for Seniors, the Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Citizens published an article entitled "Needs of Older Consumers". (See Appendix 1a and 1b). This article explored a number of consumer concerns: clothes, furniture, cars, restaurant meals, supermarkets, travel and finances. Adjacent to this article was another entitled "Have You an Opinion?" which asked the question:

"As a consumer what products or services do you feel should be available for those over sixty years of age? Have you any suggestions as to how products, services and designs now available could be tailored to meet the needs of seniors? Your opinions are very important!" Write to:

"Needs of Older Consumers"  
Especially for Seniors  
Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Citizens  
700 Bay Street, 2nd Floor  
Toronto, Ontario  
M5G 1Z6

Between August 1, 1984 and November 1, 1984, one hundred and twenty letters, many including several opinions, were received in response to this question. These letters were subsequently analyzed, and the results categorized; the findings are listed in Table 2. Opinions on other issues were received, but because they did not relate specifically to the needs of the older consumer, they have been omitted from the analysis.



TABLE 2:

OPINIONS FROM RESPONSES TO "NEEDS OF OLDER CONSUMER"  
ARTICLE IN SUMMER, 1984 ISSUE OF  
"ESPECIALLY FOR SENIORS"

<u>Category of Opinion</u>	<u># of Opinions received*</u>
CLOTHING	85
FOOD PACKAGE SIZES IN SUPERMARKETS AND PORTION SIZES IN RESTAURANTS	60
SERVICES FOR SENIORS	35
BUILDING AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN	22
TRANSPORTATION AND TRAVEL	21
LABELLING AND PRINT SIZE	20
FURNITURE AND CAR INTERIOR DESIGN	15
HEALTH PRODUCTS AND SERVICES	9
ATTITUDE OF SERVICE PROVIDERS	<u>11</u>
TOTAL	278
	=====

(\*often more than one opinion was voiced in each letter)



## CLOTHING

Seniors have clearly-defined likes and dislikes about the clothes they wear. They want durable, fashionable and dignified apparel in a variety of sizes and colors. Many women indicated they would like clothes with more front, or easy-to-reach closings. Men's trousers made of synthetic fabrics, such as polyester, are popular, although men also want more cotton socks and underwear.

All seniors seem to be searching for wider, more comfortable shoes. While women favour a more sensible, low-heeled shoe, they also continue to look for style. Slippers are also a very popular and necessary commodity for seniors; but many retailers do not stock them all year round. Over the years we have heard the frequent complaint:

"Why can we only buy slippers at Christmas?"

Drab, dark clothing, and dowdy, flowered or geometric patterns are definitely not stylish, according to respondents. Women indicated a dislike of elasticised waist bands in dresses. Socks made of synthetic fabrics also are not popular; as one respondent noted:

"Synthetics in my socks make my feet hurt."

Another quote, this one taken from Seniors Tell All, a background paper prepared by the Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Citizens, exemplifies the perceptions of some older consumers regarding the availability of suitable clothing:

"There is something about getting older that does bother me a bit, and that is the fact we don't have much choice when it comes to clothes. The manufacturers sure cater to the young. We have to buy something that makes us look perfectly ridiculous or go without".

Mr. Barry Agnew, National Sales Promotion Manager of The Bay, reported to the Plus Sixty Conference of the Canadian Council of Better Business Bureaus held in May, 1984 that:

"Fashion has a great role to play... (in seniors' clothes.) I think the whole aspect of fit and sizing is critical. The durability or the investment dressing which we hear a lot about in some aspects is probably fairly significant to the plus-60 consumer."<sup>6</sup>

The above should be concerns to clothing manufacturers and retailers who are attempting or who will attempt to cater to this growing market.

## FOOD PACKAGES SIZES IN GROCERY STORES AND PORTIONS IN RESTAURANTS

The major complaint seniors have with grocery stores and supermarkets is that they cannot buy smaller portions of vegetables and meats, or smaller sizes of canned goods.

In Seniors Tell All, one response summarized seniors' perceptions of food package sizes particularly well:

"The producers go in for large quantities of everything. That is fine for large families but I wish they would consider us too. It is better to pay a little more for a small quantity and use it up than to waste."

Mr. John Herrick, Chairman and President of General Mills Canada Ltd., echoed this sentiment to participants at the Better Business Bureaus' Conference on the Older Consumer. He stated:

"...we see older consumers tending to be more interested in small portions, because they have one or two person households and they do not want to throw away excess products. Again, it is in grocery product manufacturers' best interest to capitalize on these buying habits in trends to smaller sizes."

Mr. Doug Rapelje, Director of the Senior Citizens Department, Regional Municipality of Niagara, and past Chairman of the Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Citizens, who also addressed participants at the Canadian Council on Better Business Bureaus' Conference, suggested further refinements regarding packaging goods for older consumers:

"Packaging is important because there are more seniors living alone, particularly women. Packages, cans should be designed to open easier. Single portions and smaller sizes of fruit products and household items, like detergent, should be available."

Child resistant packaging affects people of all age groups, and can cause real difficulties for some seniors. For example, medications and many types of household products are sold in child resistant packages. The Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Citizens is currently represented on a Committee of the Canadian Standards Association and the International Standards Organization involved in the drafting of standards for child resistant packages, to ensure seniors' special needs are represented in this very important area.

In 1980 Professor H. Krucekeberg of Colorado State University, wrote a report on "Action Opportunities for the Food Industry to Better Serve the Households of the Aged and Aging." This report was the basis of an article written in 1982 by Mr. Mark Abrams, for New Age magazine, a British publication. Mr. Abrams noted that Dr. Krucekeberg made several recommendations based on his research. These include:

- o More 'special' offers on small packages;
- o More 'specials' available early in the week;
- o Some one-person meals in the frozen food section;
- o When location of a product is changed, prominent displays to and of new location;
- o Place products at eye level;
- o Train stock staff to remove clutter;
- o When quality of ingredients of a product change, then change brand name.<sup>10</sup>

Our readers also complained about large portions and high prices in restaurants. For example, one senior wrote:

"I have felt for years that restaurant meals are usually much too large which seems a shame as so much is wasted and we are constantly hearing of people starving all over the world. I think meals should be smaller and thus cheaper..."

Others made some suggestions about this:

"While visiting in Florida we patronized those places serving 'petite meals' twice as often as ones serving regular meals. It would be a good thing if places here in Ontario would try a 'petite' menu or a seniors menu..."

In his address, Mr. Rapelje was more direct:

"We have childrens' portions in restaurants. Why not have portions for seniors, as in some other countries?"

These opinions and recommendations should be considered closely by food retailers and restaurateurs.

## SERVICES FOR SENIORS

### - Shopping and Home Delivery Services

The provision of shopping and delivery services would address a real need of some older consumers. One lady found this is a problem, and remarked on it, based on her personal experience, in her response to a survey run in Especially for Seniors in Summer, 1978.

"Lack of services (is a problem), particularly as I am living on the top floor of a triplex (my home for 20 years). (I am a) heart attack and stroke victim unable to carry parcels, particularly heavy food, milk, etc...Parcels from the supermarkets by taxi is an expensive service, and I am unable to afford the additional expense..of drivers carrying parcels into my home. Some help for service from supermarkets should be arranged with crippled and aged seniors citizens in mind."<sup>12</sup>

In 1980, in a response to an attitudinal survey that became the basis for Seniors Tell All, still another respondent wrote:

"We need more home deliveries of goods, food, drugs, etc. for those who no longer drive..."<sup>13</sup>

In 1983, 471,375 people sixty-five years of age and over, or over fifty percent of all seniors had driver's licences, according to the most recent statistics available from the Ontario Ministry of Transportaiton and Communications.<sup>14</sup> This could indicate that older people are mobile; however, only 30,617 people, eighty years of age and over (of which 23,235 were males and 7,382 were females) had driver's licences. That amounted to only 6.4% of all seniors with driver's licences! The disproportionate number of women eighty years of age and over without driver's licences may indicate that this population segment could and would use reasonably priced delivery services.

More recently, one respondent to the article in the Summer, 1984 issue of Especially for Seniors remarked:

"Stores should have satisfactory delivery services."

According to one expert, Mr. Marty McGinnis, Vice-President of Grocery Products Manufacturers of Canada:

"The only segments of the retail business that are going to experience any growth over the next ten years are basically going to be drug stores and convenience stores. I also think that there will be significant growth in the area of shopping services, catalogue oriented retailers, particularly those offering delivery, or - and we will see more of this - a pick up facility."<sup>15</sup>

This is one important area for retailers, cab companies and service agencies to be increasingly aware of when they are looking at expanding their markets at a reasonable cost, both now and in the future.

#### Local Information and Advisory Services

In Through the Eyes of Others, the following observations were made:

"Some of the questions, comments and worries respondents wrote about may be unfounded... Any that can be identified as such suggest not that a particular service was missing, but simply that the information on the service was lacking. Access to information, and advice and referrals about the programs (and products) are needed."<sup>16</sup>

The central registry concept, currently embodied by organizations such as local Community Information Centres, provides seniors with some opportunity to cut through 'red tape,' and get the information they need to deal with day-to-day problems.

In this type of local information registry, it is felt that there should be reliable material on various levels of government services, local, legal and financial services, personal services and home maintenance services.

"Seniors need some contractor in the community who has been approved and who would do house repairs at reasonable rates and in a satisfactory way."<sup>17</sup>

Accurate information and reliable, affordable workmanship are, and will continue to be highly valued by seniors.

## BUILDING AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

Heavy doors, the slip hazards of bathtubs with no rubber mats or grab-bars for showers, stair-edge visibility and the need for railings along stairs, and rest areas in department stores, shopping centres and banks, and along hilly streets were of concern to many of our respondents. Quite simply, seniors want "doors that open easily either way."

To quote one respondent to our "Needs of Older Consumer" article:

"All modern buildings have TREMENDOUSLY HEAVY DOORS. It would take a weight-lifter to move them, but nothing can be done now they're installed. If only modern builders would sympathize with the elderly, frail folk, and put in doors that can be easily moved."

Bathtub accessories like rubber mats and grab bars are very important to seniors, and should be more evident in hotels and motels. On senior wrote:

"As a senior I want to speak or write (!) on behalf of Seniors everywhere about the Bars for balance on the bathtubs."

Another wrote:

"What I find missing in all motel bathrooms is the grab security bar in the shower stalls. We had them installed in our home and even for young people they can mean the difference between broken bones and otherwise."

Many slips and falls in bathrooms in the home or while staying in hotels or motels could be avoided if grab-bars and rubber mats were available.

Still other people found that washrooms should be more conveniently located; not at the bottom of a long, poorly lighted stairway, as is often the case in restaurants.

Seeing the edge of a stairstep can be difficult for people with limited vision.

As one lady stated:

"Often the edge of stairs are not too clear to see. This can be in stores, buildings...Just a lighter edge would help."

Stores that provide hand railings along stairs or at entrance steps, are likely to find more seniors among their customers.

"To many seniors, security means adequate social and financial resources as well as the presence of physical structures such as adequate railings on stairs..."<sup>18</sup>

Rest areas in department stores seem to be a 'thing of the past.' Seniors would certainly welcome their return which, therefore, could make them a 'thing of the future.'

Mr. Barry Agnew of The Bay noted:

"When I first started with the company in 1965, it was very traditional in downtown department stores to have really significant rest areas..."<sup>19</sup>

Seniors would like to see some of these features:

"Department stores ought to have good check rooms so people could leave coats and parcels while shopping. It is to the store's advantage. After all, if people are comfortable they will stay longer and buy more, but again publicity and in-store directions to same should be highly visible."

One senior expressed a more simple need:

"The odd chair in all stores (and banks)."

In cities, towns and villages where there are hills between major groupings of seniors and shopping facilities, benches would be welcome. One reader wrote:

"Towns with hilly streets should provide benches, or a bench, half-way up each street. Even in winter, many would rest a minute or so."

In a recent publication, Towards Community Planning for an Aging Society, produced by the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, this and many other community planning issues are examined in greater depth.<sup>20</sup> It is certain that concerns of this nature will become increasingly important to retailers and marketers who wish to encourage seniors to shop at their stores.

## TRANSPORTATION AND TRAVEL

Bus and train travel and travel tours are popular forms of leisure activities for the "young-old". But sometimes bus travel, and even public transportation, with all their advantages, cause difficulties for some seniors. Street car and bus steps are often too high for older people, as they are for any person with a physical disability.

One senior noted:

"Many persons over the age of seventy have trouble reaching the first step on a bus. Why can't all buses have a hydraulically-operated additional step that can be set in place for elderly people. Failing this, then a foot stool, similar to those used by train porters years ago..."

Travel tours are a growing market opportunity. According to Mary Morton, President and Owner, Mary Morton Tours:

"Statistics Canada tell me that in 1982, 25.2 percent of the total population of Canada who were 65 and over travelled. The reasons for the trips are broken down as follows: 7.4 percent for business purposes, 45.7 percent visiting friends and relatives, 46.9 percent for pleasure."<sup>21</sup>

Mr. Neil Gaskin, President of Canadian Automobile Association concurs:

"Older consumers have the desire to travel. Supporting this concept are a few facts from a profile of the members of CAA Toronto undertaken by Communications Research Centre in Toronto in 1980.

- o 63 percent indicate travel as one of their main recreational activities
- o 65 percent own luggage or baggage and use same regularly for travelling
- o 57 percent regularly obtain their maps and trip tickets from our travel department
- o 41 percent own or use 35 mm cameras which are usually used when they travel
- o 50 percent have annual incomes of \$15-35,000 (remember these are 1980 figures)

- o 25 percent buy their out-of-Canada medical insurance from our office and we sell approximately one million dollars worth a year in Toronto.
- o 66 percent live in single detached homes with an average value exceeding \$82,000
- o 21 percent live in large family apartments, thus they have the time and freedom to travel."<sup>22</sup>

Travel tours are popular, but one senior gave a blunt warning to tour operators in his letter:

"Tour managers who provide only information re: discos and very athletic pursuits can expect to reap gains only from young, athletic travellers."

Another was more casual:

"I no longer want to rise early and rush through breakfast to catch a bus. Then put in full days of sight-seeing to rise again each morning to the same rush. How about some leisurely tours, geared down a bit."

Some tours already do this; however, we feel that these are important points when considering marketing such tours to the growing number of senior citizens.

## LABELLING AND PRINT SIZE

Larger and darker, more easy to read print on price tags, receipts, cash register tapes, medicine bottles, household products, in telephone books and magazines would certainly be welcome!

In the article on the "Needs of Older Consumer," the Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Citizens obtained many very similar opinions on this issue:

"Senior Citizens' eyes deteriorate, please use large type notices and receipts."

Another senior complained:

"Yes, labels on all canned or packaged foods should have larger print of dark type. Surely the contents or use is not intended to be a secret available only to younger people with 20-20 vision."

One senior made a very important point:

"Let us have clear labelling of ingredients and directions on bottles of tablets. In many cases the print is very small against a red background, and sometimes the price tag is stuck across what one needs to know! The labels really should be clearly discernable, on medication and food items."

Telephone books, as they are now, seem to make seniors irate. One senior's comment summarized this sentiment:

"telephone book print - even with magnifying sheets - is terrible!"

Seniors also indicate their desire for more books and magazines with large print. This is a major reason why Epecially for Seniors as a major source of information and a free benefit to over 820,000 seniors in Ontario uses larger, darker, easy-to-read print.

## FURNITURE AND CAR INTERIOR DESIGN

It was stated by Mr. Doug Rapelje, at the Better Business Bureaus Conference that:

"Old age is often accompanied by loss of mobility and agility. Seniors don't want to sink into chairs..."<sup>23</sup>

This sentiment was restated in Council's "Needs of Older Consumers" survey. Many seniors told us that chesterfields and chairs are too soft and low.

One suggested improvement was offered:

"Armchairs need to be higher in the seat but also in the back so that an elderly person who wants to doze off when reading, has head support."

Another simple solution suggested was:

"If (the) chair (is) too low, use a firm cushion."

Furniture manufacturers may consider the market for senior citizens is limited; however, they should consider the fact that "empty-nesters" often relocate and often require new, high quality, durable furniture.

Car designers should also consider these concerns. One respondent noted:

"Car seats are far too low, it makes it very difficult to leave or enter a car without help."

Another consideration for car manufacturers is that seniors prefer four-door cars. To quote one respondent:

"When I needed a new car a few years ago, it was difficult to get a four door, which I needed for transporting older people mostly with sore legs or backs which make it very difficult to get in and out of a car."

These are all major design considerations for manufacturers.

## HEALTH PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Seniors are particularly concerned about health matters. In unsolicited letters to "Especially for Seniors", and in the media, health is the most important issue for seniors. In a recent poll conducted for Macleans Magazine, Decima Research Ltd. of Toronto determined that "health is far more important than money to people over sixty-five years of age."<sup>24</sup>

Many health issues were raised in letters responding to our informal survey. Dental care, medications, hearing impairment, prosthetic devices and footcare were all areas of concern. Council has published, and has made recommendations on all of these areas, based on analysis and discussion of information received in letters, in presentations made to Council and from the personal expertise of Council members. This information is included in past years' Annual Reports, and in other position and discussion papers.

In 1980, Council produced a report on Dental Care Needs of Ontario's Seniors, and has since made several recommendations on this issue to the Provincial Government, through the Provincial Secretary for Social Development. Council produced Medications and the Older Adult and Hearing Impairment and the Elderly in 1982 to stimulate discussion and action in these two areas of concern. After comments were received on the discussion paper Medications and the Older Adult, Council recommended that a card with a list of questions for seniors to ask their doctors, their pharmacists and themselves about their medications be issued to all seniors with their Drug Benefit Card. This recommendation is being implemented by the Ontario Ministry of Health.

An article on "Telecommunications for those with Special Needs," drafted by the Special Customer Needs Section of Bell Canada, was included in the Spring, 1983 issue of Especially for Seniors. After this article was published, it was determined that the Special Customer Needs section had a 24% increase in orders for custom equipment for the hearing impaired over the previous year.

Manufacturers and concerned individuals interested in obtaining more information on these topics are invited to write to Council.

### ATTITUDES OF SERVICE PROVIDERS

It is clear that attentive, helpful, understanding, informed and reliable sales people and service providers are a highly regarded, but seemingly vanishing group. Even if the consumer goods are in a store, seniors particularly appreciate the help of an understanding and patient salesperson.

It was noted in 1978, in Through the Eyes of Others, that:

"...the attitudes of others are criticised, and generally described as lacking in compassion and understanding... The quality of life for seniors will only be improved as attitudes become more positive and opportunities...are diversified with accessibility for seniors considered."<sup>25</sup>

As one senior clearly noted in 1980, in Seniors Tell All:

"we like to be part of the whole community."<sup>26</sup>

Changing people's attitudes in order for them to accept this statement is truly the marketing challenge of the coming years. In-house staff training on customer relations could improve the impression staff give to customers, especially seniors.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper we have drawn together information, comments and statistics on older consumers. A brief summary of the key considerations expressed in this paper are attached.

As a market researcher, manufacturer, retailer, service provider or as a consumer, you may feel there are other issues you would like to address. Given the demographic facts, now is the time to act. The Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Citizens encourages dialogue between seniors and those interested in serving their needs.

Please send your comments to us. Our address is:

Ontario Advisory Council on Senior Citizens  
700 Bay Street, 2nd Floor  
Toronto, Ontario  
M5G 1Z6

Telephone (416) 965-2324



## ONTARIO ADVISORY COUNCIL ON SENIOR CITIZENS

### SUMMARY OF THE NEEDS OF OLDER CONSUMERS

#### CLOTHING

- durable
- fashionable
- variety
- easy-to-reach closures
- synthetic fabrics in outer-wear
- cotton underwear
- wider, low heeled shoes
- availability of slippers year round

#### FOOD

- single portions
- smaller portions
- smaller packages
- packages designed for easy opening
- seniors menu in restaurants

#### SERVICES

- shopping services
- delivery services
- convenience stores
- pick-up facilities
- locally-operated central information registries  
with accurate information of various types of services

#### BUILDING AND ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

- easy-to-open doors
- bathtub accessories
  - grab bars
  - rubber mats
- conveniently located washrooms
- light-edged stairs
- railings for stairs
- rest areas and check rooms in department stores
- chairs in all stores
- benches along hilly streets

#### TRANSPORTATION AND TRAVEL

- lower steps on buses and trains
- slower pace on travel tours



### LABELLING AND PRINT SIZE

- larger and darker, easy to read print on
  - o price tags
  - o receipts
  - o medicine bottles
  - o household products
  - o telephone books
  - o magazines

### FURNITURE AND CAR INTERIOR DESIGN

- firmer, higher chairs and sofas
- higher car seats
- four-door cars with lots of leg room

### HEALTH PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

- reasonably priced dental care services
- clear instructions for medication usage
- reasonably priced prosthetic devices
- footcare

### ATTITUDE OF SERVICE PROVIDERS

- attentive, helpful, patient, understanding, informed and reliable sales service staff
- caring and compassionate professionals



## QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR BUSINESS AND GOVERNMENT

### Market Researchers

Do you include a proportion of seniors in your

- o test markets
- o focus groups
- o new product development strategies

### Product and Service Providers

If you are presently marketing to older consumers, are your salespeople

- o attentive, patient, helpful, understanding, informed, reliable?

If your firm produces any of the items addressed in this report, do your products incorporate the considerations listed, corresponding to that product?

### Government

Does your Ministry provide services specifically to seniors?

Are your service providers attentive, helpful, understanding, informed, reliable?



# Needs of Older Consumers

**A consumer writes:**  
Chronologically I am old and I am judged by my outer appearance as being a senior. A senior who is often caricatured as the "little old lady" or "the little old man". Salespeople tend to call me "dearie"! But, they don't see me! Nor are they sensitive to my thoughts and feelings. The real me is still here and is not wrinkled or old. The real me wants to dress, sit, drive, travel and enjoy life as I did when I was young. I also have some opinions on clothes, furniture, cars, restaurant meals, and such things as supermarkets, travel, and how to handle my finances.

**Clothes:** Men are really lucky. Their mode of dressing and colours appear to stay forever the same since the time their mothers dressed them in their first pair of long pants and strangled them with a tie. For women, it is a different story! Unless a woman is very well off or a good seamstress, or was fortunate to retain a trim figure, she is in real trouble! The affordable clothes for seniors are drab, monotonous and have very little style. Why do larger sizes come only in synthetics? Do the manufacturers assume that if someone is overweight they dribble their food all over and need "wash and wear"? Try to wiggle into panty hose? It can be the exercise of the day. Stockings come in such drab colours! How do you hold them up? There seem to be only two ways, either a corset resembling a medieval armour or a black corsetette designed for a Happy Hooker.

**Furniture:** Why do seniors have to sink into chairs to stare at their knees and need help to be hoisted out of the designer's sofas?

**Cars:** Almost half of Ontario's seniors hold a driver's licence. They want to sit up straight on a higher seat and not stretched out on the floor. Why do they have to pay more for a four door model needed to allow their friends and family to have easy access to the back seat?

**Restaurant Meals:** Children's portions are common. Why not reduced portions for others as in some countries?

**Supermarkets:** There is a growing need for small quantities, smaller cans, and readable labels with information on price, ingredients and instructions. The fading labels on meat products and some cash register slips are annoying. Larger print and better ink, please!

**Travel:** Unless one is in a totally senior group, the travel consultant invariably rattles off information on the discos, underwater explorations and higher priced restaurants. Most seniors want to shop for family and friends, see arts and crafts, museums and eat comfortable and affordable meals.

**Finances:** Seniors need advice and assistance with financial matters in understandable English. They do not need advice delivered in jargon by "advisors" who try to sell their services, often for their own benefit and not their clients.

## Have You an Opinion?

Consumers 60 years of age and over currently outnumber teenagers, yet retailers consistently overlook their buying power, according to Pauline Webb, chairman of a recent one-day seminar sponsored by the Canadian Council of Better Business Bureaus.

"The Marketplace Challenge of the 80's... The Older Consumer" was attended by a cross-section of business, government representatives and experts on aging and the needs of the elderly.

Areas of concern included the availability of better products and services for older people. It was suggested that shopping could be improved with better lighting and doors that open more easily. Travel packages designed with the older citizen in mind (more seniors are travelling today), more delivery and pick-up service, new fashion shops for 'over 50' shoppers, and provision of in-

creased knowledge about computers were among the consumer needs pin-pointed by speakers.

The general feeling seemed to stress that it was time seniors as consumers were no longer ignored. One representative of a large department store said: "Our biggest concern is to estimate whether the older consumer's buying habits or products they will buy would vary that much from what the mainstream of 25-49-year-olds would buy."

As a consumer what products or services do you feel should be available for those over sixty years of age? Have you any suggestions as to how products, services, and designs now available could be tailored to meet the needs of seniors? Your opinions are very important! Write to: "Needs of Older Consumer", Especially for Seniors, Advisory Council on Senior Citizens, 2nd floor, 700 Bay Street, Toronto, M5G 1Z6.



# From the Chairman's Desk

## This is the New Age

Someone once said - "Being a senior citizen is that time of life when experience has taught you all the answers, but nobody asks you the questions."

That situation is about to change, if the Market Research Section of the Canadian Council of Better Business Bureaus has its way. At a recently held national seminar they told their members that they are not really meeting the needs of the PLUS-SIXTY segment of our society. They urged the membership to take a better look at the 12% of Canada's population that is in this category, and the 20% of the population that will be there just after the turn of the century. This is the most untapped consumer group in the marketplace.

In 1981 a survey done in the United States of 750 persons 55 years of age and over produced the following information.

Older people are most interested in products that will meet their basic needs. They are far less likely than younger people to be swayed by the fads of the moment.

Older people are likely to reject any technological advance that decreases their opportunities to socialize. Those who have reasonable mobility would prefer to venture out to shop or share a

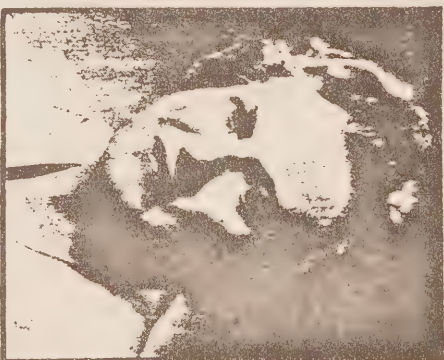
meal than remain secluded in their homes.

Will life really be better when people are able to do their banking, shopping, and a lot of other business from their homes? We who are over 60 now have adjusted to the change in our lifestyle brought about by automobiles, airplanes, radio and television, however we may not be ready to accept less familiar products of technology such as computers and robots, or any other electronic substitutes for person-to-person relationships.

Half of the respondents to the 1981 survey agreed with the statement "Improvements in technology have not made life easier, rather just more difficult to deal with." Future generations of the elderly will be better educated and will have greater opportunity to know and try the new products and services created by technology. Their reactions to technological change may be more positive.

Some of the Elderhostel courses in Computer Sciences have been oversubscribed. Other Senior Alumni groups at Universities and Community Colleges have more and more requests for this type of education.

The reluctance to accept some of the new technology is



Frances McHale

understandable, however, the refusal of the older population to confront the manufacturers, the service providers, the designers of furniture and clothes, and leisure equipment, is regrettable.

Why are so few older people involved in Consumer Education groups? Don't wait for manufacturers to conduct surveys about your likes and dislikes.

You are a valued consumer and you have the right to express your opinion and obtain goods or services you desire. After all — you are the purchaser and you are giving them your business. Take time to be your own advocate and contact the suppliers, or you can even organize your own consumer group.

I would like to invite you to

## Especially for SENIORS

Published quarterly by the Ontario Secretariat for Social Development.

Advisory Council on Senior Citizens

2nd Floor, 700 Bay Street, Toronto, M5G 1Z6

"Our Goals... The goal of the Council is to help create a province in which it is possible to grow old with dignity and a sense of usefulness; where services are adequate and varied, and include the element of choice in all facets of living; where people have concern for each other and where rejection is no longer acceptable."

(Circulation 821,264)

ADDRESS CHANGES:

Seniors are reminded that there is no need to notify the Advisory Council Office about address changes. When you notify the OLD AGE SECURITY, your address label is automatically updated for the next issue of *Especially for SENIORS*

share with us your experiences and ideas. Please write us! For details see the article on "Needs of Older Consumer Present a Challenge" page 5. Council can put the information you provide to good use, it will not only help you but also other senior citizens.



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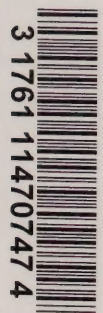
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